

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 09578 201824Z
ACTION NEA-11

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TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: JANATA PARTY POLITICS: NEARING A SHOWDOWN?

REF: A. NEW DELHI 8656 B. NEW DELHI A-138

1. SUMMARY- MORARJI DESAI RETURNED HOME FROM HIS U.S. TRIP TO
FIND THE JANATA POT CONTINUING TO SIMMER. HOME MINISTER CHARAN
SINGH IS ONCE AGAIN AT THE EYE OF THE STORM, AS HIS DISCIPLE RAJ
NARAIN HAS STEPPED UP DEMANDS THAT PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR
BE REMOVED FROM OFFICE. THE PM HAS FIRMLY REJECTED THIS DEMAND,
AND A SHOWDOWN COULD DEVELOP AT THE JUNE 22 MEETING OF THE JANATA
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 09578 201824Z

PARLIAMENTARY BOARD. NONETHELESS, WE BELIEVE THAT ALL THE MAJOR
PLAYERS WILL PULL BACK FROM THE BRINK WITH A COSMETIC COMPROMISE
RATHER THAN ALLOW AN OPEN BREAK TO DEVELOP. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER DESAI RETURNED TO DELHI JUNE 17 FROM HIS OVER-
SEAS TOUR TO FIND A HORNETS NEST OF INTRIGUE, DISSIDENCE AND
SQUABBLING IN THE JANATA PARTY. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF THE

TURMOIL CONTINUES TO BE GOI HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH, WHO EVIDENTLY IS DETERMINED TO DEMONSTRATE AT ALL COSTS THAT HE IS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH DESPITE HIS LINGERING ILLNESS. (CHARAN SINGH WAS RELEASED FROM THE HOSPITAL ON JUNE 9 AND IS NOW CONVALESCING AT A TOURIST REST HOUSE OUTSIDE OF DELHI.) SINCE OUR LAST REPORT (REFTEL), CHARAN SINGH'S PROTEGE, U.P. CHIEF MINISTER RAM NARESH YADAV, EASILY WON A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE CONDUCTED AMONG HIS JANATA MLA'S. YADAV'S VICTORY OVER DISSIDENTS IN U.P. WAS EXPECTED, PARTICULARLY ONCE IT BECAME KNOWN THAT THE SIZEABLE JANA SANGH BLOC OF MLA'S IN THE STATE WERE SOLIDLY BEHIND HIM. DESPITE THIS ENDING OF THE THREAT TO HIS POWER BASE IN THE "HINDI HEART-LAND", HOWEVER, THE HOME MINISTER HAS MAINTAINED HIS OFFENSIVE AGAINST WHAT HE PERCEIVES TO BE HIS ENEMIES IN THE RULING PARTY, CHARAN SINGH'S DISCIPLE, UNION HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN, HAS ENGAGING IN INCREASINGLY BITTER PUBLIC ATTACKS ON JANATA PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS. RAJ NARAIN, CLEARLY WITH THE BACKING OF CHARAN SINGH, HAS DEMANDED THE RESIGNATION OF CHANDRA SHEKHAR AS WELL AS OF THE PARTY'S NATIONAL EXECUTIVE ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY HAVE LOST THE MANDATE ACCORDED TO THEM AT THE JANATA'S FOUNDING CONVENTION IN MAY 1977. IN THEIR PLACE, RAJ NARAIN HAS DEMANDED A NEW PARTY PRESIDENT AND NATIONAL EXECUTIVE TO BE ELECTED BY JANATA MP'S AND MLA'S. SUCH A NEW LEADERSHIP, ACCORDING TO THE HEALTH MINISTER, WOULD BE MORE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TRUE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE PARTY. CHARAN SINGH HIMSELF, CONVENIENTLY SECLUDED IN HIS CONVALESCENCE, HAS REMAINED SILENT ON THE CHANDRA SHEKHAR ISSUE.

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 09578 201824Z

3. PRIME MINISTER DESAI FIRMLY STEPPED INTO THE CONTROVERSY IMMEDIATELY UPON HIS RETURN FROM THE U.S. HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE REPRIMANDED RAJ NARAIN AT THE AIRPORT WELCOMING CEREMONY BY ALLEGING THAT DURING HIS ABSENCE "YOUR DOINGS WERE SPREADING A FOUL SMELL". LATER ON JUNE 17 AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, MORARJI FIRMLY REJECTED ANY MOVE TO REPLACE CHANDRA SHEKHAR AS JANATA PRESIDENT. HE ALSO RULED OUT ANY EFFORT TO ELECT A NEW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE UNTIL AFTER THE PARTY ORGANIZATIONAL ELECTIONS WERE HELD IN OCTOBER. ASSOCIATES OF THE HOME MINISTER QUICKLY LET IT BE KNOWN THAT CHARAN SINGH WAS "ANGRY AND AGHAST" AT THE PM'S STRONG STAND, WHICH THEY REGARDED AS PARTISAN SUPPORT FOR ONE FACTION IN THE JANATA. DESPITE MORARJI'S REBUFF, HOWEVER, RAJ NARAIN CONTINUES HIS BRINKSMANSHIP TACTICS AND HAS REFUSED TO RETRACT HIS DEMANDS FOR CHANDRA SHEKHAR'S REMOVAL.

4. WE GATHER THAT MORE AND MORE SENIOR JANTA FIGURES ARE BECOMING DISTURBED AT RAJ NARAIN'S ANTICS AND AT CHARAN SINGH FOR CONTINUING TO INSTIGATE THEM. SOME MP'S ARE BEGINNING TO DEMAND THAT DISCIPLINARY ACTION BE TAKEN AGAINST THE HEALTH MINISTER FOR PROMOTING DISUNITY WITHIN THE PARTY. AS IN PREVIOUS SUCH CONTROVERSIES, THE JANA SANGH GROUP WILL PLAY THE CRUCIAL ROLE. SIGNALS

COMING FROM VARIOUS JANA SANGH LEADERS (PARTICULARLY JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY NANAJI DESHMUKH) SUGGEST THAT THE SANGH MAY END UP ON CHANDRA SHEKHAR'S (AND MORARJI'S) SIDE, IF THE PRESENT DISPUTE REACHES A SHOWDOWN. ALTHOUGH THE JANA SANGH SEEMS WILLING TO CONTINUE ITS ALLIANCE WITH CHARAN SINGH'S BLD FACTION IN THE STATES (AS EVIDENCED BY THEIR SUPPORT FOR YADAV IN U.P.), IT MAY NOT BE WILLING TO SIDE WITH THE HOME MINISTER AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL-- PARTICULARLY IF SUCH SUPPORT WERE TO ENDANGER THE JANATA'S STABILITY AT THE CENTER. A SENIOR SANGH MP WITH CLOSE TIES TO THE FACTION'S CHIEFTAINS TELLS US THAT THE JANA SANGH GROUP IS IN FAVOR OF STABILITY AT ALL LEVELS AND WENT ON TO IMPLY THAT IT MAY SUPPORT CHANDRA SHEKHAR IF A SHOWDOWN APPROACHES.

5. SUCH A CONFRONTATION MAY OCCUR AS EARLY AS JUNE 22, WHEN
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PAGE 04 NEW DE 09578 201824Z

THE JANTA PARLIAMENTARY BOARD IS SCHEDULED TO MEET TO CONSIDER RAJ NARAIN'S CHARGES AGAINST THE PARTY PRESIDENT. WE BELIEVE THAT AS ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, THE MAJOR PLAYERS WOULD QUICKLY PULL BACK FROM THE BRINK IF A SERIOUS SHOWDOWN DEVELOPED AND PATCH UP THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH A FACE-SAVING COMPROMISE
BLOOD

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